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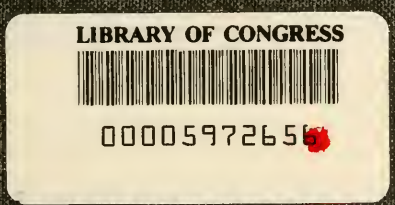

Memorial Sermon

...BY...

Rev. John W. Sayers

CHAPLAIN

Dept. of Pennsylvania, G. A. R.

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"And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray Thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw; and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha." (2 KINGS, vi: 17.)

The Psalmist has beautifully said, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." The text refers to one of these wonderful instances of providential care so often repeated in the history of the Israelitish people, and so often experienced by individuals and nations since the days of the prophets. Israel was surrounded by merciless foes determined upon her destruction. Now, the Syrians were encamped against them and formed their ambuscades at various places, expecting to entrap and cut them off. Elisha, the prophet, divinely inspired, discovered their hiding-places and kept his master informed of their movements.

So often had the schemes of the enemy been defeated that the King of Syria, exasperated and puzzled, imagined that a traitor in his own camp had disclosed his secrets. But one of his servants said, "None, my lord, O King, but Elisha that is in Israel telleth the King of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bed-chamber." The prophet was at Dothan, which the Syrians, in haste, besieged by night, so as to cut off his retreat. But a greater than Elisha was there; the Lord Jehovah had sent the invisible armies of the skies to occupy the

mountain and protect His servant from all harm. When the morning dawned and the servant of Elisha saw the armed hosts of the Syrians, he said to his master, in great alarm, "Alas, how shall we do?" Calm and undisturbed at the formidable array, Elisha prayed that the young man's eyes should be opened, when, behold, the mountain gleamed with the splendor of armed hosts of horseman and chariots of fire. Then was revealed to the young man the great truth which all the world should know—that all the armies of earth are powerless before the armies of heaven.

The prophet prayed once more and blindness came upon the Syrian hosts, so that the man they came to destroy led them to a distant city and into the presence of the King and the armies of the enemies upon whom they came to make war. Truly, they who have their trust in God "abide under the shadow of the Almighty," and He becomes to them a refuge and a fortress.

The Christian believes in God's protecting presence and through that faith his life becomes a life of obedience and trust. As the daylight fades and the shadows of night gather round him, the child of God commends himself to his Father's care, and within the hollow of the Almighty hand slumbers sweetly, peacefully and safely. As the darkness flees before the rosy light of breaking day, he offers up his prayer of thanksgiving and sings his song of rejoicing. With renewed faith and purpose he submits his strength and will to Divine guidance, and leaning upon the strong arm of the Lord of Hosts, fearlessly marches into the battle of life.

The text contains an encouraging lesson of God's providence and care for His people. No truth is more forcibly taught upon the page of history than that of a Nations exaltation through righteousness and its reproach because of sin. Sacred and profane history alike are but the startling records of the rise and fall of Nations—records that are emphasized by the splendid ruins which strew the earth and which tell alike of great exaltation and still greater humiliation, which tell of life and growth under the sunshine of truth, or death and decay under the blasting influences of transgression. The Tigris and Euphrates, the Nile, the Mediteranean and the islands of the sea, the mountains and valleys and the plains of earth all bear witness that sin has been a vortex, into which the highest civilizations have been thrown and have forever been swallowed up. God goes before the people and the nation which march along the highways of righteousness guiding them by His pillar of fire at night and His cloud of protection by day, so long as they acknowledge the directing hand and trust the divinity that shines from the fire and conceals itself in the clouds. By direction of the Almighty, the children of Israel escaped from Egyptian bondage. They crossed the Red Sea between the miraculously sustained walls of water. They saw their pursuing enemies enter the narrow path from which their own hosts had just safely emerged and they saw the water close over chariot and riders forever, but the power that moved the protecting and avenging hand was to them unseen. God was with His people and in His own mysterious way directed the hidden power which was to accomplish His

purposes. The Lord had indeed triumphed, for His people had not been required to strike a single blow in their own defense. The hand that had placed the pillar of cloud between pursuer and pursued, and that had closed the waters over Egypt's mightiest chieftains was unseen by both foeman and friend. When, in the reign of the good Hezekiah, the Assyrians came against Israel, the destroying angel passed over their camp at night and smote a hundred four score and five thousand of their bravest warriors.

There are no foes harder to battle with than those we cannot see. There are no forces more difficult to contend against than those which cannot be brought within the limits of our sight. We cannot estimate the numbers of such a foe. We cannot detect his movements nor understand his tactics. We cannot anticipate his point of attack nor calculate how we may avert or counteract his blow. Against such a presence we are helpless and defenceless. The storm rages above us, the thunder terrifies us, while the play of the forked lightning seems searching us in every hiding-place. The muffled rumble of the earthquake and the trembling soil beneath our feet startles us out of all propriety and reason, while we add to our fears and to the real danger a thousand misgivings that are purely imaginary. The pestilence that walks in darkness and invades our land bears consternation upon its wings, and we cry out, "Whither shall we fly from its dreadful presence?" Alarm takes possession of our nature. Our very humanity seems to desert us, and we fly from our neighbors and from friends and

from loved ones, hoping in our selfishness to secure some health protected spot where we may be safe. Ah! how in the recognized presence of the invisible we forget that He who keepeth Israel never slumbers or sleeps, and that we cannot fly from His presence even if we seek the uttermost parts of the earth. He means that we shall trust Him in the darkness as well as in the light. He has said, "I will not fail thee nor forsake thee." The Christian's faith is that which trusts the unseen power which lies behind all open manifestation. No matter what threatens he knows that God will send His protecting angels to keep charge over him. What is history but the recorded results of these invisible forces? The books that fill our libraries contain only some small fragments of the world's unnumbered wrecks, which have been saved from the vortex of that oblivion which has swallowed up all the rest. The chronologist computes his time by fragments—periods, as we call them, intervening between great historical events—measurements of time made up of the rise and fall of empires and republics, interspersed with the life and death of kings and warriors, and stained by blood and crime. The ruins of past greatness, which tell the sad story of glory and shame, for centuries have cast their gloom upon many of the loveliest spots of earth. We may ask what and where were the forces that caused all this desolation? Why did not one historical period, or even one generation, profit by the misfortunes of its predecessor? History points to the physical forces—the ambitions and passions of men—but is almost silent as to the unseen

influences which excited the ambition and stirred the passions which struck the blow. Man was in the destroying wind, the earthquake and the fire, but God was in the small, still voice which pronounced the doom of disobedience and sin. · History heard the din of battle but failed to recognize the mysterious power which directed the issue.

Nations come and go, they rise and fall. Like human life they seem born only to a short existence, to run their course and die. It is a serious question for the statesman of the present to consider, how long our government shall stand, what shall contribute to its permanence, or what causes shall lead to its overthrow.

How few years as we compute them, has even the oldest nation of the day existed under its present form of government. Progress in its triumphant march over the the earth, is ever dissipating political fallacies, destroying effete forms, and establishing new principles. Man is being slowly lifted to a high plane. The divinity is stirring within him, opening his eyes and removing the blindness which hid from him the invisible forces which, under God, are at his command. With us, and with what we do for the future, rest largely the responsibilities of a free government, trusting its life and its all to the masses of the people, who, irrespective of condition or race, direct its destinies by a free and unrestricted ballot.

From innumerable circumstances in our history we believe that we are highly favored of Heaven. If Israel was chosen as the pioneer of a higher civilization, of a purer morality, and as the law-giver of the world; if

Greece was chosen as the exemplar of esthetic culture and as a teacher of the arts; if England became the stronghold of aggressive Christianity; so the United States is destined to embrace all these and to become an example of still further advancement. Surely God is with us, and "they that be with us are more than they that be with them." From the time that civilization first planted its standard at Jamestown down to the present hour the mountains round about us have been filled with the invincible hosts of Jehovah. The spirit that calmed the waves and stilled the tempestuous winds on Galilee has hovered over our waters; our land has been hallowed by the footsteps of Him who went about doing good, and our homes have been sanctified by the sweet spirit of Bethany.

To-day we look backward upon our history with wonder and with gratitude to God. We look forward to a destiny that will bring the kingdoms of this earth and the Kingdom of Heaven into closer communion. Our tongues break into song and our souls into thanksgiving as we contemplate the mercies which have been our lot. When dangers threatened relief was always near. When discouragement came to our people, the heavens opened in brightness above us and the bow of promise spanned the continent. When uncertainty clouded our governmental course, the superior intelligence of our statesmen always provided a safe solution of the problem. The course of empire upon this Western Continent has never been checked. The savage red man, with his merciless tomahawk and scalping knife,

scarcely interfered with the westward flowing of the tide. His woodcraft and savage instincts were no match for the intelligence and persistent courage of the white settlers. The fierce contests over boundary lines raised up a hardy and valiant race destined for yeoman service in the future. The political disputes with the old country, which claimed our allegiance, sharpened the wits of the people, gave wisdom to our magistrates, influence to our legislators, and developed those peculiar ideas of government which has made us the most advanced of nations.

The War of the Revolution determined and settled our political status among the peoples of the earth. The confederacy which followed the Declaration of Independence demonstrated the weakness of the foundation upon which we expected to build. The Constitution of 1789 welded the States together into an unbroken and enduring chain of common interest. The War of 1812 strengthened our national bond, unified the people, and proved to the world our ability to maintain our rights. The War of the Rebellion abolished slavery, made our soil free, and forever destroyed the idea of secession as a constitutional right. The return of peace and the organization of the Grand Army of the Republic crystallized American loyalty into a gem of clearest ray and unclouded beauty. Step by step we have ascended the heights which no other nation has reached. A mighty republic has grown upon the foundation of unrestricted and universal suffrage, refuting the fallacy that men trusted with a free ballot could never govern wisely and

well. The experience of one hundred and twenty-three years has shown that, with as many conflicting interests as there are States, all may be harmonized by wise legislation and a just administration of the law. If a partisan Congress or unjust judges should decide otherwise, the people will rectify the impropriety peacefully at the ballot box. The invisible power of wholesome public opinion will always prove a conservative force among a God-fearing people. As the blood of relationship holds together the various branches of the family, so the relationship of the States creates a common interest in the welfare of all. Yea, more than this—the mingled blood of American patriotism, partaken in solemn communion by the soil of every Commonwealth in defence of the whole, would cry out from the ground to heaven against any attempt at the life of our system of government. Surely, the graves of our fallen comrades would form a rampart behind which their invisible spirits would forever keep guard over an unsevered Union.

To-day, in this memorial service, we remember our beloved dead for their part in the solution of the great problems of humanity. Not only did they freely offer themselves upon their country's altar, a sacrifice for the great interests of the present, but by their blood they became the oracle and prophet of the future. They denounced and defeated the severance of national bonds, pronounced the doom of rebellion, freed the bondsman from his chains, and predicted the coming of a national greatness which, if not already here, is rapidly upon the way. Every day should be the benediction of the mor-

row. Every generation should store up blessings for the next. We bless the past for its lessons of experience, and we revere the memories of the men who made the past a glorious prediction for the future. So we come on this Memorial Day to record our indebtedness to the patriot soldiers, pay our homage for their bravery, express our sympathy with their sufferings, and our admiration for their achievements, pledging ourselves to stand loyally by the institutions for which they nobly died.

As we gather on this day—to us a day of sad and pleasant memories, a day of instructive retrospect and of profitable anticipation for a glorious future—we meet with our dead here in this quiet God's acre, there in National Cemeteries, or perhaps far away in lonely and forgotten spots, where friendly hands have never strewn flowers. From all these hallowed places, yea, even from the depths of the sea, our dead comrades keep watch over the nation's honor. We are here to-day, a grateful multitude, to pay such tribute as we can to the heroes who did so much for us. We strew flowers of beauty upon their grassy mounds, and speak words of love and kindly remembrance; we shed tears of sorrow for the departed and express words of sympathy for the bereaved as though but yesterday they had passed out of our sight. We seem to-day to live over again the eventful past. We hear again the bugle call echoing over the hills; we see the sad partings and the long farewells; victory and defeat, bereavement and death, all pass before us in review. Our spirits hold communion with the comrades of long

ago. We know that in the body they will not again answer roll call this side of the pearly gates, but their influence will live until the reveille of the resurrection morning shall bid them rise for the great review.

"Here rest the great and good. Here they repose
After their generous toil. A sacred band,
They take their sleep together, while the year
Comes with its earliest flowers to deck their graves,
And gathers them again, as Winter frowns.
Theirs is no vulgar sepulchre,—green sods
Are all their monument, and yet it tells
A nobler history than pillared piles,
Or the eternal pyramids.

They need
No statue nor inscription to reveal
Their greatness. It is round them, and the joy
With which their children tread the hallowed ground
That holds their venerated bones, the peace
That smiles on all they fought for, and the wealth
That clothes the land they rescued,—these, though mute,
As feeling ever is when deepest,—these
Are monuments more lasting than the fanes
Reared to the kings and demigods of old.

Let these elms
Bend their protecting shadow o'er their graves,
And build with their green roof the only fame,
Where we may gather on this hallowed day,
That rose to them in blood, and set in glory.
Here let us meet, while our motionless lips
Give not a sound, and all around is mute
In the deep Sabbath of a heart too full
For words or tears,—here let us strew the sod
With the fresh flowers of spring, and make to them
An offering of the plenty Nature gives,
And they have rendered ours,—perpetually."

We have many more graves to decorate to-day than one year ago. In our own State over a thousand of our comrades have been gathered by the grim reaper—

Death. There will be more next year, and still more in the years that shall follow. As these mounds multiply, the earthly roll call shortens, and yet as the years roll by those who survive will still come to decorate the graves, and when the last comrade shall have received his honorable discharge the lessons of Memorial Day will still be remembered—they will never die.

It has been said that the peculiar genius of this memorial season is that, while other holidays praise institutions, this glorifies men, honors the private citizen and the seemingly obscure soldier. Walter Scott described Old Mortality as going through the cemeteries of Scotland, chiseling anew upon the tombstones the names that time had well-nigh obliterated. Asked to explain his zeal for the memory of these worthies, the old man replied that he wished to see the heroes of yesterday march forward side by side with the youth of to-day. That nation suffers a great calamity whose children and youth have separated themselves from yesterday's battlefields and victories, and have forgotten to honor the memories of their fathers, the sages and the statesmen from whom they have received a priceless heritage.

I thank God that loyalty to flag and country is still the countersign. It is related that an old emperor was dying. He had been a father to his people and had loved and cared for them as his children. The burden upon his heart was the destiny of his country, and what, when he was gone, should become of all that he had established for the good of his people. To give him

assurance that all would be cared for when he was no more, there passed in review before him the brave officers who had led his armies, and the veterans who had been the heroes of many a hard-fought battle. Upon their banners was inscribed, "We are loyal to our emperor and will be loyal to his country." "Yes," said the emperor, "they have been loyal and true to me, and I could trust my government to their care, but they are growing old and like me will soon be gone, and then who shall care for my country?" To further assure him of his country's safety there came before his review an army of stalwart young men, the pride and flower of the land. They were the noble sons of the veterans who had just passed, and carried on their banners the legend, "We follow in our father's steps, and will be loyal to king and country." "Yes," said the emperor, "I could die in peace and trust the country to the worthy sons of such noble sires, but alas! they, too, will soon be gone, and after them what will become of the land?" Following after the young men and stepping quickly to the tap of the drum, came the vast army of the boys of the empire, bearing upon their banners, "Our fathers have taught us patriotism and we will be loyal to our country and live and die for its best interests." "There," said the emperor, "I am content and die happy; a country built up by such loyal veterans, supported by such noble sons, and who are to be followed by such patriotic children, can never be overturned by revolution and will never die." This lesson is for us to-day. History records your loyal and

heroic service, and many of your sons, imbued with your spirit, have within the past year gone forth with the same ardent patriotism, to die, if need be, for their country's honor, and their children have been marching to the music of the Union and have been taught to love and revere the old flag for which their grandfathers fought.

In the spring-time, when the flowers come to their resurrection after their long slumber; when the birds, after their winter's silence, wake to their melody of song; when the world is bright with renewed life, we remember our dead, and they come forth to meet us, not only in precious memory as we knew them long ago, but they come in the developed and perfected work for which their death laid the foundation and of which their blood wrote the prediction. They come in the realization of the great truths for which their lives were given. They come in the broader and nobler patriotism which has resulted from their deeds. They come in the felt presence of their spirits in the very atmosphere which surrounds us.

This is a government founded upon intelligence, and can only be perpetuated by virtue. We trust the franchise to the evil and the good alike. We can draw no distinction between vice and virtue at the ballot-box. The responsibility of the choice of proper administrators is thrown upon the body politic; it becomes an education in fidelity and time has proved that, in the main, the trust has not been misplaced. It is true that mistakes are made and frauds are perpetrated, but they form

the exception to the rule. Mercenary men sometimes obtain positions of great trust, incompetent men are appointed to offices which require skill that they cannot give, and unworthy men are often elevated to posts of honor which they do not adorn, but these are not proofs of the inadequacy of the system. They but show that the work of evangelization is not universal, and that political education among the masses is incomplete. To the man of integrity, however ignorant, the burden is an incentive to higher duties and nobler aims. The defects are not of the system but of our want of a proper appreciation of its privileges. They show that we, who ought to be foremost in citizenship, have not done our whole duty. To the Christian people of this country the broad and humanizing advantages of republicanism ought to be incentives to more virtuous activity and stimulants to higher patriotic requirements in our politics. They should be to the goodness and intelligence of the country, an earnest pledge for the redemption of the ballot from unholy contamination. Let absolute truth, and that embraces all that is righteous in governments and in men, be the grand ideal that this nation shall hold up before the world. Call it an idea, if you will, and then, with the characteristic earnestness of men who are convinced of its value, let us press it home to hearts and lives of the American people. Ideas are the forces that move the world. They are invisible armies that discomfit the material hosts of folly, vice and ignorance. They are the horsemen and the chariots of fire which gather round the prophets and

conservators of civil purity, and which send dismay into the ranks of the political tricksters and jugglers and gradually cause the unworthy and incompetent to hide themselves away from public sight. They have caused revolutions and formed new governments. They have swayed the millions, and have made social life to leap forward with a single bound into higher and healthier conditions. This republic was the offspring of an idea,—the conviction that the people who were to be governed could best govern themselves independent of hereditary rulership or autocratic dictatorship. The idea that the combined judgment of the masses—the voice of the people—oppressed to the largest extent the will of God concerning us. That is our political faith to-day, but we also believe that we cannot reach or maintain a standard worthy of a free people unless we elevate our ideas of public morality for the masses and of private virtues for our representatives. The State wants:

> "Men,—high-minded men,
> With powers as far above dull brutes endued
> As beasts excel cold rocks and brambles rude
> Men who their duties know
> And knowing dare maintain."

Whatever the world may say and however infidelity or scepticism may determine, the civil world is indebted to Christianity for its wonderful progress.

Christ, the Exampler, whilst the originator of new ideas for human conduct, was also the collator of many of the old and useful, which had been abused and misapplied. For the doctrine of revenge and retaliation He gave us that of forgiveness of injuries. For the cure

of dissensions and unhappy differences He gave us due consideration for the opinions of others. For social wrongs He gave us purity of life. For the peace of the state He gave us respect for magistrates and rulers and obedience to the laws. For civil progress He gave us trust in God and brotherly kindness in our daily intercourse with men. He restrained our evil tendencies by a reiteration of the Ten Commandments. He softened our natures by the Beatitudes, and enlarged our lives and increased our hopes by the new commandments that He gaves us. He taught us the wondrous idea of love with the Divine assurance that it was the all-powerful principle for good—"the fulfilling of the law." How the cross, as the emblem of that Christianity, has been revered and loved throughout the civilized world. The Christian world of the nineteenth century is a far better world than that of the Jew or Roman two thousand years ago. Humanity stands upon a higher platform, human rights are conceded by the rulers, respected by the people, and enforced and protected by the laws as never before in the history of human government. Liberty, not only in thought and action, but in self-government, has given men higher conceptions of individual duty and has drawn their hearts nearer to each other. The cross has carried with it the idea of redemption and has given inspiration to the hope of heaven after the troubles and cares of this life have passed away. This invisible force, like the march of a victorious army, has passed from conquering to conqueror, and still like an avalanche continues to gather strength as it moves

forward. It will soon march over the boundary line into the new century and with increased ranks will carry the whole world toward the milennial year, when God's kingdom shall come and His will shall be done upon the earth. It is an idea that has fought its way against darkness and prejudice, against foes both visible and invisible; but it has made its citadel in the hearts and homes and lives of the people and it is still triumphant.

Another of the forces which fill the atmosphere and the mountains about us is the idea of our nationality. One country, one people, one flag, is our motto. Possibly the thought of secession or disunion has passed forever. We cannot part company without losing strength and influence. We can never sever our Union without becoming a reproach to the world. We cannot multiply flags without national shame and humiliation. That grand old banner, since the day that its first star was attached and all its stripes were bound together, has commanded respect and admiration upon all the waters of the globe. Resplendent and beautiful as the tints of the dawning morning, it has reflected the rays of the rising sun of freedom through all the sky, from the heavens above to the earth beneath. For more than a century it has attracted the weary toilers of the earth. The very thought of it, its name, its magnificent presence, have carried to the minds of millions the idea of liberty—liberty of conscience, liberty of citizenship, liberty of noble manhood—the right to the labor of one's own hand, to the product of one's own accumulation,

the right of the man to own himself, the right of education for his children, the privileges of equality with other men, and the right of protection against oppression.

In the midst of some great public excitement or fancied peril, we ask, "Is the country really in danger?" Are these popular strikes a menace to our institutions? Do these vast local interests which, in their selfishness, rise up in threatening attitudes, mean mischief to the whole fabric? Will a mercenary Congress ever barter our rights away for ambition or lucre? Will the American people ever yield willingly to their own humiliation? We look about us and ask, as did the servant of the prophet, "Alas! how shall we do?" But when our eyes shall be opened and we shall behold the horsemen and the chariots of fire—the great innumerable hosts of the skies, hidden from our natural eyes, we will be led to answer, "God is with us, and they that are with us are greater than they that be with them." We will not fear when we see these unnumbered detachments armed with the potent influences of the great ideas of which I have spoken. When we behold among the standards of that vast gathering the banner of the cross inscribed with Christ's new commandment and the spirits of our dead pointing to that as the life of our American institutions; when we see our own national flag bearing aloft the motto, "Proclaim liberty throughout all the land and to the inhabitants thereof;" when we see here the banner of a free ballot, and there the banner of constitutional security, and in the front of that great array a fortress of

the graves of those who fought and died for the liberties we enjoy, we need not fear for the future, for God is with us.

Against all these threatening dangers there are safeguards, and we must see to it that they are found and applied. We should multiply our public schools a hundred-fold. We should have our system of education as free, as practical and as complete as the experience of the age can make. We should have our churches increased a thousand times, have them conducted by a loyal and godly ministry, and have them supported by an honest and patriotic membership. We should bring to the work of evangelization an aggressive piety that will pursue sin and vice of every description into every stronghold and give them uncompromising battle at every step. We want the spirit that drove the money changers from the temple, that rebuked sin in high places and that administered punishment to the wrong doer without favor; the spirit that, upon the other hand, forgave the repentant sinner and in love invited the weary ones of earth to come to Him and find rest.

And so on this Memorial Day we must not forget the sources from which have come these national blessings. We go back in our history and thank God for the Puritan spirit and for that deliverance from religious oppression which brought to our shores the Mayflower and its heroic company who sought upon our soil freedom to worship God. We are thankful, too, for the prayer and song which hallowed Plymouth, a prayer whose strains still linger upon the New England air, and will forever be wafted

upon the winds back and forth to the utmost boundaries of our Union.

We are thankful that the spirit which came in the Mayflower still lives. How quickly its influence established peace after the war, in which so many of our comrades fell, was over. How it bridged the frightful chasm with the olive branch and took back to its forgiving bosom the erring ones, and restored peaceful relations with the discordant States.

Under the same influence the victorious armies of the North settled down to peaceful avocations and the hostile camp was transformed into the fraternal spirit of the Grand Army of the Republic. As again we thank God for His blessings to our country, we drop a tear of kindly remembrance over the graves of our dead, believing that in the great multitude of the invisible, their spirits will be with us to warn and guard us from all dangers which may threaten us.

Comrades beloved, may the God of peace that brought from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenent, make you perfect in every good work, to do His will, working in you that which is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever, Amen.

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